Remembrances and Reflections
Remarks by the Presiding Bishop
The Most Rev. Edmond L. Browning
Special Meeting of the House of Bishops
Kanuga Conference Center
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Since we arrived we have been doing what comes naturally with folks we haven't seen for awhile, and that is catching up. We come together and begin again -- remembering where we have been, and how we have been, since we were last together. How's it going? - we say. What's up? What's new with you?

And, if we ask, and if we listen, we find our way back into each other's lives. We fill in the short term memory. We have already caught up a bit, and we have just begun.

As essential as it is that we catch up with one another and welcome new friends, it was the sense of the Kanuga Planning Committee that we need to do something more. They wondered if we as a House might need to do a little work on our longer term memory, our institutional memory. We have a tendency to come to each meeting as if we were starting afresh, or perhaps only with some memories of the most recent past -- some positive feelings and maybe some baggage. This is almost inevitable because the House of Bishops is an incredibly dynamic entity. Since I have been Presiding Bishop nearly eighty new bishops have come to this House. That much change and movement is not easily absorbed. So, it seemed right that before moving on we reflect a little on the importance of memory, specifically the long term institutional memory of the House of Bishops, and I am delighted for the opportunity to share with you some of my own sense about this.

Memory, I believe, is very much tied in with identity. We are formed by what we remember, and equally, by what we chose to forget. That is true for individuals, and it is also true for communities, such as ours. We construct and reconstruct our histories. We polish up some memories, and totally submerge others. Some things we forget because they just didn't seem important at the time. Others that seemed momentous turned out to be just gnat bites along the way. Acting with more -- or less -- intention, health and honesty, we use our memories to piece together our notions of who we have become. We find our identity. The more intention, health and honesty we bring to the process, the closer our notion of who we are resembles who God knows us to be in our secret heart.

I believe we also need to attend to our institutional memory because, as we look back, perhaps we are graced to see how God's hand moved through the ordinary, the random to transform it, and us. Our faith is incarnational. The reality of God is made known in what happens to us. We look back at the random and the ordinary and find that nothing is random and all is extraordinary. We find meaning, and meaning, as Robert Bellah reminds us, "is the living fabric that holds all things together."

We also must look at our common past, our shared history, to inform us. We can learn from our wrong turns and benefit as well from our right actions and good practices. Looking at who we have been, and where we have been, we can ask: are we, as a House of Bishops, becoming more who God calls us to become? Have we made progress forward on our pilgrimage? These are questions we have been asking ourselves corporately and with intention beginning with our meeting here last year. And, we must keep asking them. We will be asking them in various forms this week.

At the time of your election, and your consecration I am sure you focused on and prayed about what it means to be a bishop. You prayed about your personal ministry and your call to your diocese. And, I'm sure you also thought something about what it means to be part of the episcopate. None of us is a bishop by him or her self. By becoming a bishop in the Episcopal Church you became as well part of an historic line. That means a great deal to me, and I believe to all of us.

There are various aspects of being a bishop, a member of the House, and that creates a complicated dynamic with things happening on a lot of levels. One aspect of your identity is that you express your ministry on a day to day basis without particular reference to one another. There is probably a place where you are thought of and spoken of as **the** bishop. Another aspect of your identity is membership in the House of Bishops, an entity with a unique calling to fulfill. You are also a member of the junior house of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church. Blessedly, you now are also part of a community of sisters and brothers. You will make friendships here that will change your life. I predict that in years to come people who just met yesterday will become important to one another, and then one day will say: "Didn't we first meet at that House of Bishops meeting at Kanuga? I think that was back in 1993."

Given my deep sense of the importance of memory, I want to share some things about what happened on my way to Kanuga 1993. They are both personal memories and pieces of our institutional memory as a House of Bishops.

I was consecrated Bishop of Okinawa in June of 1968 and went that summer to the Lambeth Conference. In October our interim meeting was held in Augusta, Georgia. It was a long trip from Okinawa to Augusta and I was worn out when I arrived. I had been asked to preach in a parish while I was there and when I got to the hotel and saw all those purple shirts I thought - do I have to preach in front of all these bishops? By Sunday morning I was even more nervous. But we were driving out to the church and it got to be far away - about

20 miles and I thought - It will be OK. No bishop will go that far to go to church. Well, there were about three or four there. I think Bill Gordon was there. Bill Brady, the Bishop of Fond du Lac, was there and out of that first experience Bill and I became quite good friends.

The Augusta meeting was terrible. We had invited the Canadian House of Bishops to be with us and they were staying in the same hotel. But, our House was so conflicted, in such turmoil, that we did not meet for even one hour with the Canadian bishops.

In addition to our conflict we were struggling with racial tensions. One black bishop had spoken and the next speaker just ignored that line of thought and went back to the previous discussion. Someone picked up on that and apologized to the black bishop, but called him by the wrong name. Another of the black bishops said then, "well I guess we all look alike," and the black bishops all got up and walked out. I remember Paul Moore walked out after them to try to bring them back.

I was sitting in the back row with Bill Frey and Lani Hanchett and Bob Appleyard and we were wondering what in the sam hill was going on - what had we gotten ourselves in to.

That is one memory, and fortunately it got better. We have been together though some truly fine times as well, and had moments of great satisfaction, particularly when we were sharing around some of the concerns facing the church, struggling to be faithful to the demands of the gospel.

I remember being fed by persons who have shared their gifts with us, their knowledge of God. Herbert O'Driscoll for one, Kosuke Koyama, John Coburn. Their meditations have been a source of inspiration and great support.

We have made some good decisions over the years. We have risen to the occasion and the best in us has come forward. We have been in the company of faithful servants and great leaders and, because we are all in this together, we have contributed to their faithfulness and to their greatness. It has been theirs, and it is ours as well.

I think back to the meeting in Seattle ten years ago and our superb discussions about how we make decisions. We issued a statement spelling out the theological and moral principles for decision making which was passed unanimously. Then, for all intents and purposes, we put it aside. The Kanuga Planning Committee sent a copy to all of you earlier this year as part of our way of getting in touch with where we have been.

Our institutional history includes times when we have been able to work together through our differences. In Philadelphia in 1989 we crafted a statement on the ordination of women. In Washington in 1990 we developed a statement on homosexuality. We had worked very hard over both of these statements and I believe they reflected very well where we were with issues about which we are not all of a mind.

Now, even after we did the hard work, I don't believe we or the church benefitted from either of these statements as we might have. They have not been honored in our institutional memory for what they meant to us at the time, and that is an expression of common ground. Common ground is a place to stand together while we address the issues before us. The more common ground we have the better able we will be to deal with the issues - the better able we will be to serve the church, and our Lord.

I have heard from some of you for whom Phoenix was the first meeting that you had a reaction similar to mine after Augusta '68. My recalling of my own experience will remind you that we have had conflict before. A reading of our history makes that plain, should we forget.

I want to share with you a story of something that happened just before our Kanuga meeting last year. Jack Allin happened to be in New York and he called me up and very graciously invited me out to dinner. He and Patti and I had a wonderful visit and during that time he said to me: "You know the problems the House has have been with them as long as I can remember. They were present in my time. They were present in John Hines's time. The difference is we never really stopped to take them out and look at them. We never really dealt with them, and that is what you are all doing now." I believe that is just right and I thanked Jack for his very affirming view of things.

Conflict is not necessarily a bad thing. It can be very creative. It is also inevitable. We are not all of a mind and we have some hard decisions to make - including those that are ahead of us in Indianapolis. However, in Phoenix we realized that in order to serve this church as God calls us to do we had start dealing with conflict in a more purposeful, creative, way. We determined to face into our conflict so we could work with it, and through it. We made a collaborative decision that we wanted to spend some time together without the necessity for doing legislation. I appointed the Kanuga Planning Committee as a good cross section of wise persons to plan a process for us. Last year at just about this time we came to Kanuga.

I think that even those of you who weren't with us have heard what we did here and what has developed out of our work since that time. I will touch on two things. First the four hypotheses we developed about our life. They helped us look at how we do and don't work together. In some ways they were devastating. But, when we heard them we did so with a sense of real recognition. They described who we were. Interestingly, by the time we got to Baltimore, just six months later, our memory had become a bit confused and some of us had forgotten that these had come from us, from our own words, based on interviews, surveys, indepth conversation. Some thought the hypotheses were the judgment of the consultants. But, as I say, when we were in Kanuga we looked at these hypotheses and it was like looking at ourselves in a mirror. I am going to take a minute now and just read them - so we will know the place from whence we have come.

HYPOTHESIS ONE: THE MEANING OF THE EPISCOPACY

The House of Bishops, as a collective body, has no clearly stated or agreed upon

understanding of the meaning of the episcopacy: what it means to be a bishop, what it means to be a community of bishops. This leads to individual interpretations, different expectations, idiosyncratic behavior, a loss of unity, and lack of discipline.

HYPOTHESIS TWO: STRATEGY

The House of Bishops has no clear consensus or stated understanding regarding its strategy and therefore is unclear about the direction it should be going, how it should be leading the church, how it should function in its common life and shared ministry.

HYPOTHESIS THREE: CLIMATE

The House of Bishops operates predominantly within a competitive climate. This leads to costly win/lose instead of win/win behavior, creates "ins" and "outs," distorts communication, prevents creative discussion, fosters fear and despair, and promotes distrust and isolation. The resulting polarization leads to the forming of competing coalitions.

HYPOTHESIS FOUR: STRUCTURE

The House of Bishops is not structured in ways that enable the intentional and corporate identification, analysis, and productive discussion of fundamental theological, ethical, and organizational issues facing the church. This leads to the neglect of the continual and essential interpretation and appropriation of the core of the Christian faith in relation to contemporary issues.

Well, we looked at the hypotheses. We sighed deeply - out of relief I think more than despair - because we had named the problem. We had named the problem that had existed for as long as any of us could remember.

We then committed ourselves to working on the life of the House and we made a statement of purpose that was accepted by acclamation. I will repeat a little of that statement that I have thought of often.

> "What has emerged is a commitment to a new community of relationships among the bishops without which it is not possible to make decisions which manifest the gospel. We recognized that we must focus upon our communal life as a House of Bishops because it is the source of our identity. We learned that if we cannot be bishops together, we cannot be bishops alone."

We went on to say:

> "Therefore we shall begin a new way of meeting as a House of Bishops. Whatever the immediate agenda that brings us together, we resolve to define ourselves primarily as a community of prayer, worship, and biblical and theological reflection in which to give and receive one another's gifts, and to seek God's will for our lives and our work as the servants of the church."

That says a lot, including why we are here right now. Our time at Kanuga last year put us on a very good path. We have continued down the road.

The next step was Baltimore. We were already well into the planning for Baltimore when we came out of Kanuga - very encouraged by what had happened and determined not to revert to old ways. On the whole, I think we did extremely well under circumstances that were not ideal. By that I mean we had some fixed things in Baltimore that we had committed ourselves to prior to Kanuga, we had little time to work out how spouses and their program could be integrated with ours, we had a huge task to which we were also already committed with persons invited -- that is the study of the authority of scripture, and, we had no time to work through how we would follow up on creating a better means for planning and doing our business. It was the last piece that gave us the most trouble and our Saturday evening meeting in Baltimore was a difficult one where we suffered from a bad combination of too much data and too little information.

In spite of bumps along the way, and the inevitable discomfort that arises when you try to change familiar ways - even negative familiar ways - in spite of that, we achieved a great deal in Baltimore. Our work on the authority of scripture showed us that we can come at things with a variety of approaches but still find a great deal of commonality, and the ability to honor, to learn from, our different approaches. I don't think we had that ability in Phoenix. And, we are still working on it.

The Kanuga Planning Committee came out of the meeting with a strong sense of purpose about their task. As you know, they determined not to continue with consultants, except for some help on the process, but, building on the superb work that had been done, and with the help of other members of this House, they have labored faithfully on behalf of all of us to continue a work that had been well begun. That brings us to today. Our meeting this week is, I pray, another step in a faithful journey.

I do not in any way believe that in this short time I have given an historical overview of the last twenty five years. I have just touched some of the highs, some of the lows. What I hope I <u>have</u> done is to lift up for us the notion that we as a community have an shared history and an institutional memory. Individuals come and go. Who they are together makes the body who it is. At the same time, we are part of a larger reality and a longer history. It is our inheritance, our treasure. Our hopes are recorded, our joys and glories, our pain and tears. God's hand is on every page as God has been with us all along the way.

I pray God we spend our time here in an awareness of the cloud of witnesses who have gone before us. I give thanks for them. I pray God we spend our time here in an awareness of the saints of God who will follow us. Especially, I pray God that we may be faithful in the carrying out of our ministry as a House of Bishops so that we may serve the church, be faithful to the imperatives of the gospel, and do the work of our Holy God for the honor and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.